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## Review of Nazan Çiçek, *The Young Ottomans: Turkish Critics of the Eastern Question in the Late Nineteenth Century*

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Nazan Çiçek, *The Young Ottomans: Turkish Critics of the Eastern Question in the Late Nineteenth Century*, I. B. Tauris: London, 2010; 320 pp.; 9781848853331, £59.50 (hbk)

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The 'Eastern Question', coined by European powers in the nineteenth century, came to denote the diplomatic and political problems posed by the decline of the Ottoman Empire. The historiography on the Eastern Question has been mostly Eurocentric, addressing the diplomatic history of the Eastern Question without taking into consideration the Eastern actors of the Question, that is, the Muslim Turks. One of the major actors to emerge during the height of the Eastern Question was a group known as the Young Ottomans who became extremely critical of the Tanzimat reforms in general and the Ottoman Porte's handling of the Eastern Question in particular. Nazan Çiçek's *The Young Ottomans* aims at providing a fresh analysis of the Eastern Question from the perspective of the Young Ottoman opposition. By situating them in the context of the Eastern Question, Çiçek aims at diverting the discussion away from the 'rather over-examined ideological affiliations of the Young Ottomans towards their inadequately analysed assessments of and conviction about some controversial issues' (10). These controversial issues include the Cretan insurrection of 1866–69 (which was a watershed for the formation of the Young Ottoman movement) (76), the crisis in the relationship between the Muslims and the non-Muslims in the nineteenth century coupled with the economic ascendancy of the latter, the increasing foreign intervention in the affairs of the Empire, and the dire financial situation of the Empire. In addition, the book sheds new light on the relationship between the Young Ottomans and the Turcophile British Orientalist group, the Urquhartites.

In her book, Çiçek rightly argues that during Tanzimat reforms the relationship between the Ottoman reformists and the Great Powers was not *monological* in nature but rather *dialogical* (in the Bakhtinian sense) and was a period during which the Powers and the Porte were in continual dialogue (17–19). In this *dialogical* relationship, the Young Ottomans believed that they had to take matters into their own hands in order to avoid the collapse of the Ottoman Empire by despotic reformers Âli and Fuad Paşas. Hence, she discusses in depth the impact of the Tanzimat reforms and their role in shaping the psyche of the Young Ottoman Triumvirate (Namik Kemal, Ziya Bey and Ali Suavi). Çiçek traces their journey from the establishment of the Patriotic Alliance (*İttifak-i Hammiyyet*) to their exile in Europe. She furthermore demonstrates how the Young Ottomans thought of instituting a parliamentary system as a panacea for all the problems facing the empire. They believed that once *usul-ü-meşveret* (constitutional regime) was introduced, ‘all the abuses would gradually come to an end, and so too would the separatist tendency of the non-Muslim’ (125).

Despite its fresh insights, the book has some minor shortcomings. First and foremost, Çiçek discusses the Young Ottomans by concentrating on the three dominant figures. In doing so, she marginalizes other non-dominant actors of the movement who might not have been ‘the brain team and the public face’ (40), but whose writings and reflections could have shed additional light on the Young Ottomans’ perceptions. These include Halil Şerif Paşa, Memhed Bey, Ebuzziya Tevfik and Agâh Efendi among others. Second, despite the fact that Çiçek tends to quote extensively from the Young Ottomans’ press, be it *Hürriyet*, *Muhbir*, *Ulûm* or *Tasfir-i Efkâr*, the reader does not get a sense of what the public thought of them during the period under study. Third, Çiçek tends to extrapolate the impact of the Tanzimat reforms on the economic condition of the non-Muslims in the Empire through the lens of the Young Ottomans. At the end of the day it was only a substantial minority among the non-Muslim groups that benefited from the economic changes. Finally, it would have been great if Çiçek had dwelt a bit more in the introduction on the dilemmas that the Young Ottomans faced from comparative/global perspectives. Despite the fact that she touches upon the *Seikyōsha* group in Japan during the Meiji Restoration, it would have been more fruitful to discuss in a bit more detail their attack on Westernization and their call for ‘preservation of national essence’ (*kokusui hozon*).

Overall, Çiçek has made an important contribution to the field by overcoming the ‘authority syndrome’ (7) and delivering a fresh analysis of the salient features of the Eastern Question. The book demonstrates the political stance of the Young Ottomans on the very legitimacy of the modernization/Westernization in the nineteenth century engineered by despotic statesmen. The book will be useful for every graduate student, scholar or historian who is interested in exploring different dimensions of not only the Young Ottomans and the Eastern Question but also of late Ottoman intellectual and political history, the dialogical nature between the East and the West, and finally understanding issues of modernization/

Westernization in non-Western societies in the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries.